

1 A Transcript of a Discussion about the Cuban Missile Crisis

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3 with ROBERT McNAMARA

4 GEORGE BALL

5 U. ALEXIS JOHNSON

6 McGEORGE BUNDY

7 and RICHARD NEUSTADT, Moderator.  
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MR. NEUSTADT: Gentlemen, sometime ago when some of us

met with Secretary Rusk to discuss the Cuban Missile Crisis, we skirted the Secretary of Defense's perspective, Robert McNamara's perspective, because he wasn't there. He had tried to get there, but weather prevented. He is here today. And without inhibiting any of the rest of you, I would like to open-up by asking -- asking him the first questions, beginning, Bob, with the issue how did you see the nature of the problem when you first became aware that the Soviets were enplacing missiles in Cuba? What did you think the situation was and required?

MR. MCNAMARA: Well, to begin to think about possible ways of reacting one had to start there. And it took sometime for the group of us that were considering it to come to any consensus on the nature of the problem, because there was an obvious disagreement between those, on the one hand, who saw a great increase in strategic nuclear power -- the Soviet Union very close to the U.S., 90 miles away -- and those of us who saw it, but didn't believe that it in anyway changed the strategic nuclear balance. And I think ultimately we came to that conclusion, that the U.S. had had a great superiority, numerical superiority -- superiority in strategic nuclear power before the Soviet moves into Cuba, but that superiority, numerical superiority, was not such that it could be translated into usable military power to support political objectives. Because before the missiles were placed in Cuba, before the bombers were placed in Cuba, the Soviets had

1 enough strategic nuclear power to face us with the prospect of  
2 unacceptable damage if we used ours first against them, or if we  
3 used ours in any fashion against them.

4 And therefore, in a very real sense, we believed before  
5 the forces were put into Cuba, that we were deterred from using  
6 our strategic nuclear forces.

7 MR. NEUSTADT: That depends on your conception of --

8 MR. McNAMARA: Deterrence.

9 MR. NEUSTADT: -- of unacceptable damage.

10 MR. McNAMARA: Yes, it does, exactly. And -- And the  
11 belief I held then, the belief I held today -- hold today is that  
12 a President of the United States feels that his first responsi-  
13 bility is to protect this nation and he is unwilling, I think --  
14 certainly that was true of President Kennedy and President John-  
15 son after him, and I believe it would be true of most U.S. Presi-  
16 dents. They would be unwilling to consciously sacrifice an impor-  
17 tant part of our population or our land and place it in great  
18 jeopardy to a strike by Soviet strategic forces, whether it be  
19 one city, or two cities, or three cities. And before the weapons  
20 were placed in Cuba, the Soviet Union had the power to respond  
21 to U.S. strategic nuclear action in ways that would endanger one  
22 or more of our cities. And therefore, we felt deterred from using  
23 our numerical superiority and that was not changed by the intro-  
24 duction of nuclear weapons into Cuba.

25 That doesn't mean to say we didn't have a problem that

1 we needed to react to. But it began to -- to place the nature of  
2 that problem in a somewhat different context than it first  
3 appeared.

4 MR. NEUSTADT: Why do anything? If you have no strate-  
5 gic problem, why not just say ho-hum, missiles in Cuba, so what?

6 MR. McNAMARA: I think that we felt then, certainly I  
7 felt then and feel now that the Soviets do not wish, did not wish,  
8 do not wish a large scale war with the West, but that they will  
9 probe for weakness. We've seen that many times. We saw in 1961  
10 when they put pressure on Berlin, for example. We've seen it many  
11 times since. They will probe for weakness and they will take ad-  
12 vantage of weakness when they find it. And that weakness can be  
13 either military, or political, or both. And the great danger in  
14 this situation was not that the military balance had been  
15 changed, because, as I have suggested to you, we didn't believe  
16 that it had, but rather that if we failed to react, that the  
17 Soviets would believe, and as a matter of fact the American pub-  
18 lic and the publics of the Western European nations would believe  
19 the political balance had been changed.

20 The Soviets would recognize weakness and they would  
21 move to take advantage of that weakness, political weakness. And  
22 it was that fear or that belief that led us to the conclusion we  
23 had to react in some fashion. But our reaction should be addressed  
24 to the problem and the problem was not strictly speaking, in the  
25 narrow sense, a military problem.

1 MR. BUNDY:

Could one just add on that point that

2 long before we were faced with any kind of calculation of whether  
3 there was a change in the strategic balance -- that is to say,  
4 during the summer when the rumors began -- the President had  
5 clearly thought about it and had said that he didn't believe they  
6 would do anything as dangerous as to put offenseive weapons into  
7 Cuba, but that if they did, the gravest issues would arise. And  
8 without presuming to know everything that was in his head when  
9 he said that, he clearly wasn't thinking about how many missiles  
10 of who -- what weight, in which place, but rather about what it  
11 would mean if the Soviet Union thought it could put thermo-  
12 nuclear weapons in the Western Hemisphere after a warning that  
13 this really would be conduct that the American people would take  
14 the gravest view of.

15 And just as an additional point, I think one has to  
16 bear in mind that in thinking about this, we had also to ask our-  
17 selves what our own country would think. And it was very clear  
18 that public reaction to this action would be, if anything,  
19 stronger than anything we were considering in that first week.

20 I'm not trying to change the point, but only to add one  
21 element in what is this issue.

22 MR. NEUSTADT: So that action despite warning, even if  
23 the warning was, in fact, belated, the warning had been given. It  
24 was a public fact.

25 MR. BUNDY:

Public warning.

MR. BALL: Yes, and there is one other element,

which at least in my mind played a -- a role, not the key role, but certainly a significant role. And that was that the Soviets deliberately acted in deceit. That this was the most flagrant kind of deception on their part. They were constantly giving us assurances that they were not doing this, when, in fact, they were going ahead and doing it. They, even after we learned it, had full proof that they were doing it, we were still getting that kind of denial. And we could not be in a position of accepting an act of deception without some kind of -- of reaction, apart from the other considerations that have been mentioned.

MR. JOHNSON: Yes. In that connection, I think it's useful to recall Gromyko's conversation with the President after we had discovered the missiles there.

MR. BALL: In other words, if we're going to live in a world with the Soviet Union, where the relations are almost by definition somewhat adversarial, we have to insist on a certain pattern of conduct on their side. And if we accept an act of deception without a reaction, then it seems to me we simply encourage them to continue deception, and that makes any kind of modus vivendi impossible.

MR. NEUSTADT: Well, now Khrushchev said in his memoirs, if indeed they were his memoirs, that on the one hand these -- these weapons were intended for defensive purpose, so that if they were outside the President's warning because the

1 President had distinguished defensive from offensive. And second,  
2 that -- that the Russians kept it secret to try to be helpful to  
3 Mr. Kennedy. They didn't want to create trouble for him before  
4 the congressional elections. How about that, George?

5 MR. BALL: Well, I think that's manifest nonsense,  
6 given all the circumstances. This is an excuse that he might have  
7 used with his own people, but it certainly was not persuasive to  
8 any American.

9 MR. NEUSTADT: How did you get into the defensive-  
10 offensive distinction, which may have confused them?

11 MR. BUNDY: Well, the distinction was really not  
12 defensive-offensive. The distinction was conventional-nuclear  
13 and that was a polite way of talking about it. And Mr. Krushchev  
14 can play games with that in his memoirs, but he was not in any  
15 doubt and nobody else was. And really to have accepted that form  
16 of words as a cover and a means of saying oh, it doesn't matter  
17 would have fooled nobody, least of all ourselves.

18 MR. JOHNSON: I can't recall that at the time they even  
19 made any allegation that they were defensive. Now he does in his  
20 memoirs, but they did not when they -- when this was all exposed.

21 MR. BUNDY: They did maintain that we were the only  
22 ones who said they were offensive. You will recall, at the end,  
23 he says that we will withdraw the weapons which you consider --

24 MR. JOHNSON: Which you call offensive, that's right.

25 MR. BUNDY: -- offensive. But all that's words games.

1 MR. JOHNSON: But they didn't debate it.

2 MR. NEUSTADT: Well, given the problem definition,  
3 what about the alternatives?

4 MR. McNAMARA: Well, then -- then the question was how  
5 to react. And as I have said, the fact that we didn't think it  
6 changed the strategic nuclear balance, I think pointed our reac-  
7 tions in certain ways. But within the general direction we -- we  
8 considered we should move, there were several different alterna-  
9 tives we considered ranging from blockade or quarantine on the  
10 one hand, to invasion on the other.

11 As one looks back on that period, I think we would  
12 have to recognize a paranoia among -- among the American people  
13 with respect to Cuba. It existed for a number of years. There  
14 were some, certainly some parts of our public, and some in the  
15 Congress and in the Executive Branch who believed that Castro  
16 was such a threat that we should take this opportunity to invade  
17 and overthrow Castro. That was one extreme.

18 Another extreme was the view of those who felt that  
19 we should seek to put sufficient pressure on - on Khrushchev to  
20 force him to remove the offensive weapons or to make them inoper-  
21 able, but no more than was required to do that, and with the least  
22 danger of some undesirable Soviet reaction. And that group put  
23 forward the blockade. Inbetween there were other alternatives.  
24 The possibility of what was called the surgical strike, perhaps  
25 50 sorties by aircraft against the sites, designed to destroy the



1 weapons.

2 As we began to consider these alternatives, we very  
3 quickly moved to a consideration I think points to lessons  
4 applicable today. Consideration of how the Soviets would react.  
5 We couldn't just assume that we would blockade and they would do  
6 nothing. We couldn't assume that if we invaded and destroyed the  
7 Castro government they would do nothing.

8 And therefore, as we laid out the alternatives, we --  
9 we debated how the Soviets would respond and how we would res-  
10 pond. And we had to assume in each case they would respond. And  
11 some of the potential responses were very dangerous indeed. I  
12 mentioned three alternatives: blockade or quarantine, surgical  
13 air strike against the offensive weapons, and at the other  
14 extreme, an invasion.

15 Very soon it became clear that a surgical air strike  
16 could probably not remain surgical. That the -- the -- a strike  
17 of 50 sorties against the offensive weapons would probably have  
18 to be enlarged to take out Cuban air defense, including their  
19 fighter bases, and probably raised to such a degree that almost  
20 surely it would involve an invasion. And we then began to con-  
21 sider how the Soviets would respond alternatively to a quarantine  
22 versus -- versus some form of military pressure, possibly invol-  
23 ving either a large air strike and/or an invasion. And we had to  
24 conclude there was a high risk that they would respond to some  
25 pressure on Berlin, on Turkey, on other parts of NATO, and these

1 were factors that -- that were taken into account and ultimately  
2 led, I think, to almost unanimous support for the quarantine.

3 MR. JOHNSON: Bob should add there, I think, that there  
4 was some support -- I don't say it was given very much considera-  
5 tion -- for the so-called diplomatic approach. That is, that we  
6 should tell the Soviets that we've discovered the weapons and  
7 working through the U.N. and diplomatic sources, try to persuade  
8 them to remove the weapons.

9 MR. McNAMARA: Yes.

10 MR. JOHNSON: I'm not saying that was really a  
11 serious -- a serious alternative, but it was -- it was advocated  
12 though.

13 MR. McNAMARA: And I think it was associated, at least  
14 by some supporters of that, Alex, associated with the thought  
15 that one could start with a diplomatic approach and if that were  
16 not successful, it could --

17 MR. JOHNSON: That's right and then --

18 MR. McNAMARA: -- we could then, in a sense --

19 MR. JOHNSON: -- and then move up the scale.

20 MR. McNAMARA: -- escalate in a military direction.

21 MR. JOHNSON: That's right. That's right. Yes.

22 MR. McNAMARA: Which, by the way, was one of the main  
23 arguments in favor -- put forward by those who favored the quar-  
24 antine, that if one started with a quarantine, relatively, I'll  
25 call it, low level military action. If it didn't succeed, one

1 could move, if then thought desirable, to higher level of mili-  
2 tary action. But the point --

3 The important point I want to make here is that very  
4 early on in the consideration of these alternative responses, we  
5 began to consider how the Soviets would respond to the response.  
6 And we recognized the potential escalation beyond what we would  
7 perhaps have in mind when we took the first step.

8 MR. BALL: There was another point, I think, which is  
9 associated with that, and that is that unless the installation  
10 of a blockade resulted in the sinking of a Soviet ship, no irre-  
11 vocable act had been taken, which required or made imperative a  
12 response on the Soviet side. There would be time, possibly, for  
13 -- for conversation and this thing might be sorted out.

14 Once an irrevocable act had been taken, whether a sur-  
15 gical air strike or an invasion, or something of that kind, then  
16 the Soviets would be compelled to do something in the nature of  
17 retaliation. So what we were doing was buying time for a dialogue,  
18 having made clear our position as a very firm position, putting  
19 it up to the Soviet Union to have the option of withdrawal without  
20 creating a situation where some kind of retaliation would be  
21 imperative.

22 MR. JOHNSON: In short, we did not need to start the  
23 shooting.

24 MR. BALL: That's right.

25 . MR. BUNDY: Not only didn't need to, we didn't want to.

1 If we could get those weapons out without shooting, we wanted  
2 to get them out.

3 MR. JOHNSON (Simultaneous w/Bundy): Well, I say, the  
4 weapons -- No, the weapons. That's what I say. It did not require  
5 us to -- All the other courses of action required -- required us  
6 to start shooting.

7 MR. BALL: And an irrevocable act. I think this is a  
8 very significant point.

9 MR. NEUSTADT: But, if it's in -- Okay. I accept that  
10 point. Now take the other side of it. If it is implicit in the  
11 quote "surgical strike," it has to be a big surgical strike and  
12 it probably has to be followed by an invasion, which is what I  
13 think I heard you say. Why did that remain a live option for four  
14 days? You know, 20 years later, it seems like a hell of a way to  
15 use military power. How long did you think it would take you to  
16 -- to get rid of the -- of the guerilla actions in Cuba after  
17 you started down that course?

18 MR. McNAMARA: It wasn't as much that that deterred us  
19 from the -- the invasion route, but rather the recognition that  
20 an invasion would (a) cause the death of a substantial number of  
21 Americans, and we made some very rough estimates, and one can  
22 argue about them, but we recognized the possibility 25,000 Ameri-  
23 cans might die in the process. (b) That there would be very sub-  
24 stantial loss of Cuban life. And (c) that almost surely the  
25 Soviets would have to respond in areas outside of Cuba. You're

1 quite correct in implying that if we had had an invasion, apart  
2 from the loss of life, ours and theirs, we would have had a very  
3 serious problem of stabilizing the situation in Cuba.

4 MR. BALL: And a lot of Russians would have been  
5 killed --

6 MR. McNAMARA: And a lot of Russians would have been  
7 killed. And almost surely, the Soviets, both because some Rus-  
8 sians were killed in Cuba and because, in a sense, we had con-  
9 fronted them with a military challenge, would feel it necessary,  
10 so we thought, to respond elsewhere in the world. And we then  
11 would be faced into a possible response elsewhere in the world.

12 So, we saw this -- the danger of escalation and I  
13 think it was that action-reaction recognition that led us to  
14 wish to achieve our objective, a very limited objective. We  
15 weren't seeking to overthrow Castro. We weren't seeking to  
16 change the relationship of Cuba to the United States. We were  
17 seeking only one thing: the removal of the offensive missiles  
18 and aircraft. And we wished to achieve that at the lowest poss-  
19 ible risk and we recognized that if we failed to achieve that  
20 by applying an quarantine, we still had the option, should we  
21 wish to exercise it, of moving to the next higher level of risk.

22 <sup>Buddy</sup>  
~~MRS. JOHNSON~~: May I go back to your question, which is  
23 why did the air strike stay alive as long as it did. Well, I  
24 think there were a lot of reasons for that. One was that the  
25 first reaction of so many people was, well, you know, they have

1 done this, we didn't think they would, they had surprised us,  
2 the obvious thing to do is to take them out, a simple-minded  
3 phrase, but it occurred to many people. It's what the President  
4 said to me, the very first morning. I don't mean to be stuck with  
5 it, or that it was in any sense a final response. It happened  
6 again when the members of Congress were briefed the following  
7 Monday. It was the very strong reaction of Dean Acheson, who had  
8 been a kind of elder statesman and adviser to the Administration  
9 precisely on the question of Soviet danger, particularly around  
10 Berlin, but more generally.

11 And in addition, I had feelings about -- There were  
12 weaknesses to the blockade, which we don't need to take time on  
13 now. But the most important point, I think, and one that we  
14 should hear from Bob McNamara about, was that the uniformed mili-  
15 tary leaders, who were highly disciplined in the end, I think,  
16 about accepting the course the President laid down, were very  
17 strongly of the opinion that this was a provocation which  
18 required a prompt and effective military response. And for them  
19 that meant military action against the island of Cuba. And I  
20 think it would be important for Bob to tell us, not the whole  
21 story because you'd need to hear from the military, but his view  
22 of the problem of working with the military in that first week  
23 of consultation.

24 MR. McNAMARA: Well, I want to go back to one of  
25 the problems Mac made. The support for a massive air strike

1 and/or an invasion was the first reaction of most people con-  
2 fronting the problem. You mentioned the -- the congressional  
3 representatives. The Congress was not consulted or briefed until,  
4 as you recall, on the Monday following the decision of Sunday to  
5 -- to initiate the blockade action. And I think I'm correct in  
6 saying that almost unanimously the members of Congress opposed  
7 the President's decision to initiate a blockade and favored much  
8 stronger military action, either a large air strike or invasion.  
9 That was the immediate reaction of most people confronting the  
10 problem.

11 And I think one of the lessons to be learned from this  
12 situation is that one should not act on one's immediate reaction.  
13 One should take time to think through the implications of that  
14 and alternative courses of action, because those of us who did  
15 have the time to think it through, as the members of Congress  
16 did not, changed our minds or gained support for an initial posi-  
17 tion contrary to that, that view.

18 Now why -- Why did those who supported the invasion  
19 alternative continue to hold that view after they'd had time to  
20 think of the possible reaction? And I think because they viewed  
21 the Soviet threat in a different way, is one reason. Secondly, I  
22 think they felt -- and we were never able to test the validity  
23 of this thought -- but I think they felt that an invasion might  
24 be more costly if it were deferred, rather than put forward as  
25 the initial response. If we started with a quarantine and

1 ultimately had to move to an invasion, the Soviets would have had  
2 time to prepare for it, both militarily and politically, and not  
3 only on the island of Cuba, but -- with potential responses and  
4 perhaps more dangerous responses elsewhere in the world. So  
5 those were their reasons.

6 I think they were wrong. I think with hindsight we  
7 were right in starting with the quarantine, but it was not an  
8 easy decision for many of the members of the Executive Committee  
9 to come to.

10 MR. NEUSTADT: Because the quarantine could fail of  
11 the minimal objective that it's proponents had set for it. That  
12 is it could -- could fail to remove those missiles.

13 MR. McNAMARA: Correct. Yes.

14 MR. NEUSTADT: Leaving you then with --

15 MR. McNAMARA: With what to do and, in a sense, with  
16 a more dangerous situation, because then we could hardly, having  
17 instituted a quarantine --

18 MR. NEUSTADT: Then you have to go up.

19 MR. McNAMARA: -- and having failed to achieve a  
20 narrow objective, it would have been very difficult not to esca-  
21 late to the next step for which the Soviets would have had more  
22 time to prepare. And I think that was the argument used by many  
23 in favor of going to a higher escalation initially.

24 MR. BALL: There was another element which played a  
25 role in this and which I think Bobby Kennedy made clearer than



1 anyone, when he said my brother will not be the Tito (sic) -- or  
2 the --

3 MR. NEUSTADT: Tojo.

4 MR. BALL: The Tojo of 1961.

5 MR. JOHNSON: Or the Tito either.

6 MR. NEUSTADT: Or the Tito either, or the Tojo in this  
7 case.

8 MR. BALL: Meaning that a surprise attack was all too  
9 reminiscent of Pearl Harbor. A surprise attack would be some-  
10 thing that would be out of character for a great nation such as  
11 the United States. Nevertheless, if we had immediately responded  
12 with what was the instinct, as Bob McNamara suggested, of a  
13 number of people, we'd immediately responded with an air strike.  
14 It would have been a secret air strike, an unannounced air strike  
15 presumably, and that the United States would have been held up  
16 in the world as a country who attacked a small country with --  
17 and took it by surprise in a very unattractive way.

18 MR. JOHNSON: Yes. I recall that Bobby's point on that  
19 affected many members of the ExCom who were up to that point  
20 thinking in terms of an air strike.

21 MR. BALL: Well, I had made a statement very early-on  
22 which was certainly representative of deep convictions I had that  
23 every nation has to act out of -- in character, and if it acts  
24 out of character it destroys itself to some extent. And Bobby  
25 said it very much better later on when he said my brother will

1 not be the Tojo of 196 --

2 MR. NEUSTADT: Well, if I understand correctly what  
3 happened in the week -- you had this time, of the four or five  
4 days, you had time and we can later ask what happens if you  
5 don't have time. Is the -- The decision which is more costly,  
6 the small start or the big one, is -- is argued out. But some-  
7 thing else is argued out. What are the minimal objectives for  
8 which we're going to do -- we're going to act at all here? Did  
9 I get that right? And that not everybody involved was satisfied  
10 with those minimal objectives.

11 MR. BUNDY: There's another way of stating that, and  
12 again I think Bob is in a very strong position to help to clarify  
13 it. I think that what your objectives were depended upon who you  
14 chose to make your target, and vice versa.

15 If you were strongly in favor of dealing with the  
16 Castro problem with this as a kind of opportunity to do so, then  
17 your objective was not to have a treaty with Castro, it was to  
18 get rid of him. And that goes with, in general, the position  
19 that favors very strong action against the island of Cuba, not  
20 everybody, but in general.

21 If, on the other hand, you thought that this was a  
22 problem which posed the gravest of dangers between the United  
23 States and the U.S.S.R., then your objective would be to deal  
24 with the problem which created that danger, which was the mis-  
25 siles, neither more nor less. And if you reached the second

1 conclusion, then you would frame the whole enterprise around  
2 Soviet responses, as Bob has already suggested, what will they  
3 do, and you would regard Cuba and Castro himself as -- not only  
4 as dependent variables, but as dependent variables of very low  
5 weight. I don't know whether that --

6 MR. McNAMARA: Yes, I think Mac has explained it very  
7 well. There was among our people a time a paranoia with respect  
8 to Cuba. Very common. It was held by the public, and it was held  
9 by members of Congress, and by some members of the Executive  
10 Branch.

11 MR. BUNDY: And we'd campaigned on it.

12 MR. McNAMARA: And it -- It was perhaps understandable,  
13 but that doesn't make it something one should yield to.

14 MR. NEUSTADT: Or you'd have a Bay of Pigs.

15 MR. McNAMARA: However -- However, this was an oppor-  
16 tunity for those who -- who felt that way to suggest let's deal  
17 with our Cuban problem. And it was that feeling that led some to  
18 support a proposed invasion.

19 I think the President ultimately decided, and I think  
20 the Executive Committee agreed, the problem that we were going to  
21 deal with was not a Cuban problem; the problem was a Soviet prob-  
22 lem and we should look upon it as such. It was a potential change  
23 in the balance of relationships, not between the U.S. and Cuba,  
24 not even between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, but rather between  
25 NATO and the Warsaw Pact, and we should think of it in those terms

1 And we should take the minimum action...

2 (End of Side 1, audiotape No. 1.)

3 MR. McNAMARA (Continuing on Side 2):...other way in  
4 the future. And that was really initially the major difference  
5 of opinion between those who wished to -- to invade Cuba, on the  
6 one hand, versus those who suggested the quarantine, on the  
7 other.

8 MR. BUNDY: I think we should press this point,  
9 because if I recollect correctly, there was nobody that I recall  
10 outside the military and the very top of the intelligence, where  
11 I think perhaps John McCone may have shared this general view,  
12 who held the view that the problem was to be framed in terms of  
13 cutting out the Cuban cancer. And therefore, the fact that this  
14 opinion was not pressed harder on the President than it was has  
15 a great deal to do with the judgment rendered and expressed for  
16 the Defense Department by Mr. McNamara. And I think anything he  
17 can tell us about the way that argument progressed in the Penta-  
18 gon is important because it didn't go very far in those terms  
19 in the ExCom, at least as I recollect it.

20 MR. McNAMARA: Well, I -- I think in the Pentagon the  
21 views differed. I know you will talk to General Taylor and I  
22 would wish him to express his own view. But my recollection of  
23 his view was that he, in contrast to some of the other Chiefs,  
24 did not favor an invasion in order to overthrow Castro and change  
25 the relationship between Cuba and the U.S. But there were strong

1 feelings in the Pentagon that that should -- we should take  
2 advantage of this situation, an opportunity some called it, to --  
3 to solve a problem that we'd lived with for three or four years  
4 before then, and that it was feared would adversely affect us  
5 in the future. And therefore, there was strong support among  
6 some quarters in the Pentagon for the invasion route, for  
7 exactly that reason.

8         There were others in the Pentagon who felt that regard-  
9 less of whether we -- we weakened Castro or not, we would need  
10 to apply more pressure on Khrushchev than would be applied by a  
11 blockade, if we wished to force him to take those offensive  
12 weapons out or make them inoperable. And they were the ones who  
13 supported initially the surgical strike and moved later to a  
14 recognition or a belief that it could not remain surgical and  
15 therefore one should plan on an initial large-scale air attack,  
16 which they also recognized would very likely be followed by an  
17 invasion, which might have the incidental effect of overthrowing  
18 Castro, but would not have been initially directed toward that  
19 end.

20         MR. BALL: One other -- One other element which again  
21 might be mentioned and that is that the effect of limiting action  
22 to a quarantine, at least as the initial step, was that it tended  
23 to localize any possible Soviet response. They could respond by  
24 -- respond by trying to run their ships through, but the response  
25 to a quarantine wouldn't be a bombardment of the missile bases in

1 Ankara, or wouldn't be a pressure on Berlin. This wouldn't be --  
2 appear to be the indicated response.

3 On the other hand, an air strike could -- could very  
4 well have -- have triggered that kind of retaliation against  
5 Berlin, or even against -- very specifically against Turkey,  
6 which would have caused a great deal of problems for us, because  
7 we had our missiles in Turkey at that time.

8 MR. McNAMARA: We considered the problem of a Soviet  
9 strike against Turkey, because we had missiles there and there  
10 was some apparent balance, Cuban missiles-Turkish missiles. And  
11 there was certainly the possibility that the Soviets would respond  
12 to our air strike on Cuba by some pressure on Turkey and we  
13 couldn't have tolerated a Soviet strike on Turkey without a  
14 response. And it was that action-reaction and the potential  
15 escalation that we took great account of in examining and evalua-  
16 ting the alternatives. And we had time to do it. And I come back  
17 to this importance of the time. It took time to do this. It took  
18 time for our own thinking to recognize the danger of Soviet  
19 response, the alternative forms of that response, and the need  
20 to our response to the response.

21 MR. BALL: In other words, a Soviet bombing of the  
22 missiles in Turkey would have triggered the whole NATO Treaty  
23 mechanism.

24 MR. JOHNSON: I hope we can come back to this question  
25 of time to consider this, because I think that was one of the --

1 that was one of the keys that we were able to handle, the Presi-  
2 dent and the ExCom were able to keep the security on the issue  
3 and on the consideration of responses to it within a small group  
4 which gave that group time to think about and talk these things  
5 through free from the pressures of -- of outside influences.

6 MR. McNAMARA: I think one -- One can almost draw a  
7 law from this. Within certain limits, the longer the time taken  
8 to form the decision, the more sound the decision will be.

9 MR. JOHNSON: Yes.

10 MR. McNAMARA: I'm certain that was true in --

11 MR. JOHNSON: Very much so.

12 MR. McNAMARA: -- four, or five or six days in this  
13 case.

14 MR. BALL: We were lucky in one regard. That is that  
15 we discovered the missiles before they were operative. If the  
16 missiles had been operative at the time we discovered them, I  
17 think we would have felt rather differently.

18 MR. JOHNSON: Yes, I remember during that week, if you  
19 recall --

20 MR. BUNDY: Logically, it wouldn't have made any  
21 difference, but psychologically it would have made a very big  
22 one.

23 MR. McNAMARA: But I'd still put forward my law. Even  
24 if we hadn't discovered the missiles until after they were opera-  
25 tive, I think the longer time we would have taken to consider

1 how to react, the more sound our reaction would be, within  
2 certain limits.

3 MR. BUNDY: Let's linger on that one moment though,  
4 because the thing we all remember about the time we had was that  
5 we had it, in part, really in very large part because nothing  
6 had leaked --

7 MR. JOHNSON: Yes, that's right.

8 MR. BUNDY: Because certainly one story in the news-  
9 papers would have changed the environment of the discussion and  
10 we all wanted not to do that and we wanted to preserve what  
11 turned out to be very valuable, the President's right, in effect,  
12 to set the terms of the crisis by his own announcement before  
13 there were leaks.

14 Now accepting Bob's law, that the more time the  
15 better, I think one has to add another law that has developed  
16 in the last 20 years, which is likely there will be less time  
17 than there was the last time because things leak much faster in  
18 the government of the United States than they did 10 years ago,  
19 let alone 20 years ago.

20 Unless you're determined, and this may be your point,  
21 to take the time in spite of the leaks.

22 MR. McNAMARA: Well, I -- A, I am, Mac, determined to  
23 take the time in spite of the leaks, or would recommend to the  
24 Executive Branch they take the time in spite of the leaks. But  
25 B, I would urge that the Executive Branch, the public and the



1 media think about this whole problem. I'm not suggesting that  
2 the media should not report whatever they know under most cir-  
3 cumstances, but I am suggesting there are certain circumstances,  
4 and I would suggest that the consideration of the use of military  
5 power is one of those, where the President and the Executive  
6 Branch are constituted authorities who have the decisionmaking  
7 power to apply military power, should be given time to think  
8 through the problem. And the members of the Executive Branch  
9 should recognize a greater responsibility to avoid leaks under  
10 those circumstances than perhaps they do otherwise. And the  
11 public should be more tolerant of secrecy in the Executive  
12 Branch under those circumstances, as should be the media.

13 Now maybe those are hard -- hard rules of conduct to  
14 adhere to, but I suggest that we should at least talk about those  
15 in our society.

16 MR. NEUSTADT: I like your other one, too. I've never  
17 heard it discussed before, which is if -- If the public -- If  
18 the media and the public don't act in the way -- and the bureau-  
19 cracy does not act in the way that you would think appropriate,  
20 you're saying the chief officials of the government should --  
21 should not let publicity precipitate them into action. Is that  
22 what you're saying?

23 MR. McNAMARA: Now I understand the costs of that. I am  
24 saying that. And I want to very quickly say I understand the costs  
25 of that because you give up surprise or some element of surprise

1 perhaps. And by giving up surprise or tactical surprise you pay  
2 a potential cost --

3 MR. BUNDY: You may, not always.

4 MR. McNAMARA: You may. And what I'm suggesting to  
5 you is, in my view, in most situations, the potential cost asso-  
6 ciated with giving up surprise is less than the potential cost  
7 of making a decision without having thought through its conse-  
8 quences.

9 MR. BALL: Bob, I hate to think, however, of what would  
10 have happened if there had been a really serious leak on, say,  
11 Tuesday instead of Friday when -- when The New York Times finally  
12 did get the story.

13 MR. McNAMARA: Well, I hate to think of it. That's why  
14 I'm suggesting the law because I really -- I really think --  
15 The greatest lesson I took out of this, George, is the -- the --  
16 the increasing soundness of the decision with the passage of  
17 time.

18 MR. BALL: Well, I agree. But I'm just trying to think  
19 how we could have held off for three, or four, or five days with  
20 the country screaming at us, when are you going to react, what  
21 are you going to do, with speeches in the Congress, with resolu-  
22 tions being passed, with demonstrations in the streets, the place  
23 would have been -- the country would have been up in arms.

24 MR. JOHNSON: And giving the Soviets during that period  
25 a time to decide what they were going to do.

1 (Several speaking at once briefly here.)

2 MR. McNAMARA: Let me suggest to you how we could have  
3 reacted. And the only reason I want to dwell on this is if we're  
4 going to face these situations in the future -- there's no ques-  
5 tion about it in my mind. And the great temptation is to respond  
6 to the public pressure. And if you accept my law, that the  
7 response is likely to increase in wisdom with the passage of  
8 time, you pay a very heavy price to respond to the pressure.

9 So, I -- Accepting what George has said, let me suggest  
10 how we should have responded if we had -- if it had leaked on  
11 Tuesday.

12 The President should have said I am determined to  
13 protect this nation. The security of this nation is my number  
14 one responsibility. At the same time --

15 MR. JOHNSON: Well, of course, the advantage we had  
16 was, with no leak whatsoever, the Soviets had no contingency  
17 plan to deal -- to deal with it.

18 MR. McNAMARA: Well, that's -- That's right. So he  
19 starts by saying that.

20 MR. JOHNSON: -- have had more time to -- their contin-  
21 gency plans.

22 MR. McNAMARA: But as an indication of that, I am  
23 throwing up the reserves, I am moving air squadrons, I am con-  
24 sulting with my allies. I'm not arguing that this is --

25 MR. BUNDY: I am going to the U.N. There are lots of

1 things that don't finally commit you that you can do for time.

2 MR. McNAMARA: Yes. The point -- The point I'm trying  
3 to make is that all of you -- We've all served together. We all  
4 know these terrible pressures. And there is an immense tempta-  
5 tion to respond by immediately military action and I'm suggest-  
6 ing it's dangerous.

7 MR. BALL: There's -- There's one other point that was  
8 implied, but not stated, and that is had there been a leak on  
9 Tuesday and an uproar in the United States -- and I totally  
10 agree with what Bob has just said as to what the objective  
11 should have been. There were two dangers. Not only that the  
12 Soviet Union would have time to reply, but that the Soviet Union  
13 would reply precipitously and lock itself in so that a solution  
14 would have been impossible.

15 VOICE: Oh, sure, yes.

16 VOICE: Yes.

17 MR. BALL: Khrushchev saying something, you know, again  
18 not taking the time to think it through. And this is the kind of  
19 -- of action and reaction that really leads to deep, deep  
20 trouble.

21 MR. JOHNSON: Yes, I think we all agree thoroughly  
22 upon Bob's law.

23 MR. BALL: But I think what we ought to do -- I mean  
24 the implication of what I'm saying is we ought to persuade the  
25 Soviets to do the same thing, so we have this kind of mutually

1 understood law that nobody's going to act in a hurry.

2 MR. McNAMARA: Well, and that's a conclusion I -- In  
3 this nuclear age, isn't that one of the things we ought to spend  
4 more time thinking about.

5 We do an awful lot of talking about reducing the num-  
6 bers of nuclear weapons, but we ought to also think about how to  
7 reduce the risk of use. And one of the ways to do that is to  
8 convince the Soviets that together we ought to communicate more  
9 and take more time on whatever element of confrontation there is  
10 between us.

11 MR. JOHNSON: There's a great deal to be said for that  
12 and we -- we really need to have a better mechanism, it seems to  
13 me, for --

14 MR. McNAMARA: I agree, absolutely.

15 MR. JOHNSON: Rather than right at -- starting at the  
16 summit.

17 MR. BUNDY: And when you say mechanism, I take it  
18 you're not just talking about -- although we need it -- a more  
19 sophisticated, quicker, more rapidly translated all-purpose hot  
20 line ---

21 MR. JOHNSON: Oh, no, no, no, no, no.

22 MR. BUNDY: You're talking about a process of communi-  
23 cation which involves people, units, assignments, customs, prac-  
24 tices, a sustained method of making sure that communication pre-  
25 cisely about the things in which we have the gravest disagreements  
exists.

1 MR. JOHNSON: Exists and can be used.

2 MR. NEUSTADT: Stockpiling things to do publicly while  
3 you're thinking, both for the media's sake and the public's sake,  
4 and with the Soviets, it seems to me I haven't heard that before.  
5 I think it's very important, because no new Administration would  
6 have your list of calling up the reserves or doing it now, isn't  
7 that right?

8 MR. BUNDY: Well, I'm not sure that's -- I think that's  
9 an important point, that you need to have some experience of  
10 these options. There are military options, there are diplomatic  
11 options, there are political options. One of the most obvious,  
12 which we did not use in this case for our own reasons, is con-  
13 sultation with the Congress. And consultation with the Congress  
14 need never be a merely one-shot affair.

15 MR. NEUSTADT: No, and it can take an infinite amount  
16 of time.

17 MR. BUNDY: And the Congress, if it thinks that the  
18 Administration is too strong, is quite capable of having an ini-  
19 tial reaction that is much more wary. This particular case, we  
20 have decided on an action which the congressional leaders find  
21 less strong than their own emotional reaction. But there are  
22 plenty of examples the other way and I think we should not neglect  
23 at all in thinking about not only ways of thinking, and ways of  
24 saving time, but about serious constitutional process.

25 If we frame it that way, we will see that it's the

1 exception not the rule that you wish to start a flaming crisis  
2 without a serious consultation with the Congress.

3 MR. NEUSTADT: What you all were trying to do was not,  
4 quote, start a flaming crisis, but get the advantage of sur-  
5 prise.

6 MR. BUNDY: In what was already by the factual situa-  
7 tion --

8 MR. NEUSTADT: Right, de facto.

9 MR. BALL: Surprise and a reasoned --

10 MR. NEUSTADT: Yeah, that's right, yeah.

11 MR. BUNDY: Initiative --

12 MR. McNAMARA: Minimum response necessary to achieve  
13 a narrow objective after thoughtful consideration of alterna-  
14 tives.

15 MR. NEUSTADT: Let me ask you something that has not  
16 come up before. If a number of people, civilians and military  
17 people, saw Cuba as the primary problem, or if not the primary  
18 problem, as an important secondary problem, take an advantage of  
19 an opportunity to cure this secondary problem. It's like cross-  
20 ing the 38th parallel in 1950 because for five years the U.N.  
21 has been trying to unify Korea, so what the hell, let's get this  
22 too. Whether it's primary or secondary, a lot of people, you're  
23 saying thought that here was a time to get the Cubans out of play.

24 Now had the government at the highest level, between  
25 the Bay of Pigs in the Spring of '61 and this occasion in

1 October of '62 -- At your level, had you ever decided that that  
2 was -- that your policy was to live with Cuba? I know you  
3 decided it in the end -- by the end of this crisis, because you  
4 gave a pledge by the end of the crisis. But had you -- Had that  
5 policy decision ever been made? Otherwise, all the people who  
6 thought Cuba should be got rid of are acting on what they must  
7 assume is -- is the Administration's desire, even though fumbled  
8 in the Spring of '61?

9 MR. BUNDY: I think that it's even more severe than  
10 that. I think that the -- after the Bay of Pigs, we did engage  
11 in a policy of confrontation with Cuba, accompanied by a program  
12 of covert action that wasn't very effective, but that wasn't  
13 for lack of trying or for lack of pressure and initiative from  
14 the President on down. And it was a perfectly legitimate feeling  
15 for the rest of the Executive Branch to have that the Admin-  
16 istrative really finds this -- this regime deeply offensive,  
17 believes it's dangerous, and would welcome effective ways of  
18 getting rid of it.

19 So that your question, which I'm sure is not wholly  
20 innocent, is designed -- is correctly designed to bring out the  
21 fact that we had not reached the conclusion that we must live  
22 with this guy. We didn't even reach that conclusion after the  
23 Missile Crisis, because the covert enterprises continued well  
24 into '63. And it's really only in the Fall of '63 that the Presi-  
25 dent turns his own attention to the question of a search for  
alternatives.



1 MR. NEUSTADT: Well, you gave up then in October -- You  
2 gave up an overt invasion --

3 MR. JOHNSON: The overt invasion. Invasion is what we  
4 gave up, yes.

5 MR. NEUSTADT: Well, I hadn't seen before that the --  
6 the upset about giving -- Two things -- If I hear you right, two  
7 things are happening. At the top level of government the risk of  
8 -- of -- this -- in this confrontation between you and -- and the  
9 people in Moscow is powerfully concentrated in your minds on  
10 something that the rest of the government is entitled to have a  
11 fuzzy signal about, which would help explain why there was a --  
12 a sense among numbers of military people that you'd -- you'd  
13 been pucilanimus or you'd given up a great chance, or whatever  
14 the proper terms are.

15 MR. McNAMARA: Well, I think that there was a feeling  
16 among -- After the offensive weapons were removed from Cuba, I  
17 think there was a feeling among some members of the Congress,  
18 some members of the Executive Branch, including the military,  
19 and some members of the public that we had missed an opportunity  
20 to overthrow Castro. I don't think there's any question but what  
21 that feeling existed.

22 MR. JOHNSON: We should have got more out of it.

23 MR. McNAMARA: Yeah, it was a rather common feeling  
24 among some groups. I think they're absolutely wrong, but the  
25 feeling existed. And in part it existed for just the reason you

1 pointed to, there'd been no decision beforehand, before October  
2 of '62, that the government would not take advantage of an  
3 opportunity to possibly use military force or some other force  
4 to -- to eliminate Castro.

5 MR. NEUSTADT: And as you've said, it was a very popu-  
6 lar notion in the United States, in the country.

7 MR. McNAMARA: The nation was paranoid. I don't want  
8 to say the Administration; the nation was paranoid.

9 MR. JOHNSON: Without regard to the costs to us. With-  
10 out regard to the fact that, quote, getting rid of Castro at  
11 that point could not be accomplished by a quarantine of missiles.

12 MR. McNAMARA: Absolutely not.

13 MR. JOHNSON: It -- It had to be -- had to involve the  
14 initiation by the United States of shooting, of shooting.

15 MR. NEUSTADT: Well, let us take a break, gentlemen,  
16 for a few minutes and give them a chance to change the tape.

17 (End of Side 2, Audiotape Tape 1.)

18 MR. NEUSTADT: Let's turn to the question of putting  
19 the President's chosen option into effect and mandating the work  
20 that had to be done throughout the Executive Branch, military  
21 and civil authorities, from the time of the decision was made to  
22 start with the quarantine option. Have you got some points there,  
23 Bob?

24 MR. McNAMARA: Yes. I think the implementation or the  
25 monitoring of the implementation of the President's decision was

1 a very important element of the -- the action, because it wasn't  
2 initially clear to everyone what the decision was. Quarantine,  
3 normally thought to be synonymous with blockade. Blockade,  
4 what's a blockade? Well, the American Navy had been operating  
5 blockades at various times in the past 200 years and there were  
6 certain rules of procedure how you run a blockade. And the most  
7 important element of a blockade was to stop things from going  
8 through, whatever you were blockading.

9           However, that wasn't the President's decision. The  
10 President's decision was we wish to remove the offensive weapons  
11 from Cuba. We want to convey to Khrushchev a message that that  
12 is our single objective. It's a very narrow objective. We wish  
13 to apply the minimum pressure necessary to accomplish it. We  
14 don't wish to paint you in a corner. We don't wish to humiliate  
15 you. We particularly don't wish to escalate militarily anymore  
16 than is absolutely essential to achieve that objective. Now  
17 that's not what a blockade normally means. This wasn't called a  
18 blockade, I understand that. It was called a quarantine. But you  
19 said what are we doing to the average person in the Pentagon --  
20 we're blockading Cuba. Well, we're not blockading Cuba in the  
21 way we had run blockades in the previous 200 years. That was not  
22 widely understood and we had one hell of a time during the initial  
23 days in making clear that it wasn't the traditional blockade.

24           MR. JOHNSON: Blockade is normally an act of war in  
25 international law. And that word quarantine was very carefully

1 chosen in order to avoid the term of blockade by our legal  
2 advisers, and a very important part of the success -- or the  
3 rationale for it was that we got the OAS states unanimously to  
4 approve a quarantine on the grounds of self-defense, which did  
5 not make it an act of war. And that's -- That's -- The word  
6 was very advisedly chosen.

7 MR. BALL: It wasn't without some precedent. It  
8 was a word that Roosevelt had used, you may recall.

9 MR. McNAMARA: Yes -- little precedent in terms of  
10 operations.

11 MR. JOHNSON: But -- But the word was used very  
12 advisedly, not just for political purposes, but to give inter-  
13 national sanction to what we were doing. And we did have inter-  
14 national sanction.

15 MR. NEUSTADT: -- two different issues here. One is --  
16 diplomatic and the other operational.

17 MR. McNAMARA: The point is we had thousands, liter-  
18 ally thousands of people involved in implementing the President's  
19 decision to quarantine Cuba, and they all had to have orders. We  
20 had planes flying all over the world. We had ships at sea. We  
21 had officers in -- in the war rooms issuing instructions. We had  
22 messages flowing back and forth. And everyone had to have -- be  
23 perfectly clear in their mind there was a difference between  
24 quarantine and blockade, or between, I'll say, an act of war and  
25 a non-act of war, or between starting a war and not starting a

1 war, or between going beyond the President's narrow purpose and  
2 not going beyond it.

3 The President was really trying to write a letter in  
4 terms that Khrushchev would understand. He sent messages by cable,  
5 of course. But he felt those would be possibly misunderstood and  
6 he was, in a sense, writing a letter through the application of  
7 a quarantine. Now that's quite different than what the Navy had  
8 been doing for 200 years.

9 MR. BUNDY: And the difference, I think, can be  
10 expressed in another way in terms of who really was going to  
11 decide what, because the fact that the President was designing  
12 a communication meant that he had to consider each evolving step  
13 in that process of communication from the point of view of what  
14 he was trying to do. And that's why -- We talked in Atlanta about  
15 the President being a desk officer, and I remarked down there  
16 that he had an assistant desk officer. And when you have a desk  
17 officer and an assistant desk office, and they decide that they  
18 will decide what ships will do what, it's not entirely surprising  
19 if the successors of John Paul Jones are startled.

20 MR. McNAMARA: Well, you might use the word John Paul  
21 Jones advisedly because this came up one night and the assistant  
22 desk officer didn't leave the Pentagon, or just slept at the Pen-  
23 tagon every night for ten or eleven nights, because of the neces-  
24 sity of being certain that in this very peculiar situation, the  
25 President's wishes, and desires and decisions were clearly

1 understood by everyone.

2 And I recall very clearly one night -- I think it was  
3 the Wednesday night after the quarantine became effect. If I  
4 recall correctly, the quarantine became effective at 10:00 A.M.  
5 on Wednesday morning, and at that -- that night we were looking  
6 ahead to the potential events of the next 24 hours and it was  
7 apparent that at least one Soviet ship would approach the so-  
8 called quarantine line during that period. And the question was  
9 what should be done. And the answer from -- I'll call it the  
10 traditionalists, or the answer according to tradition was obvious  
11 -- stop it. But it wasn't as obvious that stopping it was the  
12 action that would be most consistent with the President's deci-  
13 sion, and it wasn't at all clear exactly how it would be stopped,  
14 or what would happen if it were stopped.

15 . As it turned out, it was a tanker. And when one  
16 explored the ways in which one could stop a tanker, one could--  
17 one could think about talking to it, or radioing to it, or send-  
18 ing up signal flags and stopping it that way, but then if it  
19 didn't stop, what does one do. And you can fire across its bow  
20 and if it still doesn't stop, you think about what to do, and  
21 the next level of pressure is to actually fire into the rudder  
22 or other parts of the tanker, and the damn thing might well of  
23 exploded. And you get quite a different level of pressure on  
24 Khrushchev than the President perhaps wished to apply at that  
25 time. And the traditionalists, in effect, said, well, McNamara,

1 you don't seem to understand that for 200 years, since John Paul  
2 Jones -- He must have heard of this story, because those were  
3 the exact words used. You don't seem to understand that for 200  
4 years, since John Paul Jones, the Navy has operated blockades  
5 very successfully and we no doubt can do the same thing here.

6 But this was not a blockade to be run in the tradition  
7 of the 200 years. And therefore, the actions had to be monitored  
8 and were monitored very, very closely, both within the Pentagon,  
9 and between the Pentagon and the National Security Council, and  
10 the Office of the President. And I think, with hindsight, suc-  
11 cessfully.

12 What actually happened in that case, as you know, is  
13 the tanker was allowed -- allowed to proceed.

14 MR. NEUSTADT: Well, you know, there's the great story,  
15 the earlier great story of -- of -- of the planes lined-up wing-  
16 tip to wingtip in Florida --

17 MR. McNAMARA: No. No, if I may interrupt you. The  
18 story was not quite that. The story was that we sent reconnaiss-  
19 ance aircraft over Cuba and they came back and they showed pic-  
20 tures of the stupid damn Soviets and Cubans lining their planes  
21 up wingtip to wingtip, and we showed those to the President. The  
22 President said, well, I'm glad they're stupid. He said, by the  
23 way, he said, how are our planes doing. He said, send reconnaiss-  
24 ance planes over Florida, and by God, they were lined-up the same  
25 way.

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378  
1 MR. NEUSTADT: Well, I'm sorry I misstated it. It's

2 hard to keep standard operating procedures from operating.

3 Bob, what do you think if this kind of monitoring had  
4 had to go into a third week?

5 MR. McNAMARA: I think it can continue indefinitely.  
6 What you have to have in purpose, intent, understand it. And  
7 that, I think, we had at the top. We had it at the Presidential  
8 level. I hope we had it at my level. We had a Chairman of the  
9 Joint Chiefs that was absolutely superb, the highest possible  
10 sense of integrity -- I'm speaking of Max Taylor. And when you  
11 have those three layers determined to monitor, I don't think that  
12 an extention of time need weaken the monitoring. You just -- You  
13 know, you replace one person with a deputy, or whatever, and you  
14 -- And also, over time, you begin to clarify, the common law  
15 begins to develop precedence and understanding.

16 MR. NEUSTADT: That's as long as you're running a  
17 quarantine.

18 MR. McNAMARA: Well, under whatever situation. What  
19 I'm really suggesting is I think that if it's very clear that  
20 the President is in control, is making decisions, and that was  
21 clear in this situation, and if it's very clear that the Secre-  
22 tary is acting for him and with his full authority, and if you  
23 have a Chairman of the Joint Chiefs who is strong, experienced,  
24 and absolutely determined to carry out the decisions, and the  
25 desires, and the thoughts of the President and the Secretary,



1 then I think this kind of monitoring can go on indefinitely, and  
2 you just get organized to ensure that it does.

3 MR. BUNDY: But let me -- Let me ask a question that  
4 may -- may sharpen your question, because I think it's certainly  
5 true about the quarantine, which is after all the use of naval  
6 power in a situation where we had commanding superiority, that  
7 once you find that your object is to stop those ships or signal  
8 those ships that the President wishes stopped or signaled, and  
9 you have clearcut chain, everything follows as Bob has just  
10 expressed it.

11 One of the reasons precisely for choosing the blockade  
12 was that it was even in anticipation something that you could  
13 manage, and calling it a quarantine, you could manage it the  
14 better and explain it the better. And one of the reasons for  
15 rejecting the air strike, especially the closer you looked at it,  
16 was that you did have this very important assertion of opera-  
17 tional requirements. I'm not saying the President couldn't have  
18 ordered a single airplane to strike if he wanted to, but the  
19 problem would have been very different, because it would have  
20 been against possible opposition. And running that kind of engage-  
21 ment, while you can do it in terms of the loyalty of your comman-  
22 ders, is very much harder in terms of the predicability of res-  
23 ponse or the character of the engagement that may pull you onward  
24 in the second, third and fourth stages.

25 MR. BALL: If you'd lost 10 planes out of your 50

1 sorties, it would have been --

2 MR. McNAMARA: But I want to go back though and stress  
3 what I said, because -- And this is not wishful thinking and  
4 you'll think my thought was father of the wish. That is not the  
5 case. But I want to say that we are living in a world in which  
6 when there is conflict between the Soviet Union and the United  
7 States, or between the Warsaw Pact and NATO, I believe it must  
8 be monitored this way, and I mean literally this way, 24 hours  
9 a day, by the President and the Secretary and the Chairman.

10 And the reason I say that is, is that they're 6000  
11 nuclear warheads on the soil of Western Europe and about 3000  
12 of those are within almost an artillery shot of the border, and  
13 those things can be overrun and overrun very quickly.

14 MR. JOHNSON: Bob, I'll add to that --

15 MR. McNAMARA: And therefore -- Just one further word,  
16 Alex, if I may finish. And therefore, it is absolutely essential  
17 that in the future, when these two great powers, the Warsaw Pact  
18 and NATO, come in military confrontation that every single action  
19 be monitored as closely as they were during this situation.

20 MR. BUNDY: And with this much -- Excuse me, because  
21 I think I'm defending my position in the face of an oblique  
22 attack by my learned friend.

23 MR. McNAMARA: No, no, no --

24 MR. BUNDY: But I think you're right, but doesn't it  
25 follow that the level of direct military conflict that we can

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1 tolerate between the United States and the Soviet Union without  
2 the gravest risk that this kind of control becomes unmanageable  
3 is really quite low compared to what we have understood in the  
4 past.

5 MR. McNAMARA: Yes. Yes, but maybe we can't avoid --

6 MR. BUNDY: Some.

7 MR. McNAMARA: -- some and we -- we blunder into it. I  
8 don't believe that -- I know we don't want a conflict with the  
9 Soviet Union. I don't really believe the Soviet Union wants one  
10 with us, but we can certainly blunder into it. And as a matter  
11 of fact, I would guess that within the next ten, fifteen years  
12 we will blunder into it, hopefully low level. And what I'm sug-  
13 gesting is that one of the lessons of the Cuban Missile Crisis  
14 is in this nuclear age the President, and the Secretary and the  
15 Chairman must personally monitor every single action 24 hours  
16 a day. Now it gets much more difficult when you have troops  
17 engaged in a broader front -- No, I understand. But it's got to  
18 be done that way.

19 MR. JOHNSON: I add to that that I most thoroughly  
20 agree and in my lectures to war colleges and chiefs and so on,  
21 I always phrase it in terms that the President in this day in  
22 age, the nuclear age, is going to require and demand absolute  
23 control whenever -- and our communications, our command arrange-  
24 ments, not only in Defense, but also in State as well, our  
25 ambassadors, have to be such that they are immediately responsive

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1 to the President's -- the President's wishes. And there's no --

2 MR. BUNDY: Well, far be it from a White House-type to  
3 say that that's a bad idea.

4 MR. JOHNSON: No. I think it's -- You've raised a  
5 valid point. At what point does it become -- a scale that doesn't  
6 become impossible. But, I think it's a very, very important point  
7 to be made and I don't think it's fully accepted yet.

8 MR. McNAMARA: No. I don't think it's accepted.

9 MR. BUNDY: No. Tradition runs the other way, unfor-  
10 tunately. The ambassador is tired of getting instructions from  
11 the Department, let alone instructions from the White House.

12 MR. JOHNSON: I know, but we're accustomed to respond-  
13 ing to a President a little bit.

14 MR. NEUSTADT: Well, it certainly runs the other way  
15 in the American military tradition. The commander in the field  
16 is --

17 MR. JOHNSON: You assign the mission and he's given  
18 the responsibility for carrying it out. And I'll always say that  
19 those days are over. Those days are over.

20 MR. NEUSTADT: I'd love to know -- Well, never mind.

21 You -- You -- Another aspect --

22 MR. McNAMARA: Let me interrupt your thought. I'd love  
23 to know whether the Soviets have the same view and are prepared  
24 and capable of doing it. And if they aren't, we ought to be  
25 talking to them about it, because it takes two to hold down this

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1 level of risk in a nuclear age. I'm sorry I interrupted you,  
2 Dick, but I -- We ought to be discussing these kind of subjects  
3 with them. This -- This is another lesson from this conflict.

4 Some people have said, well, nuclear weapons really  
5 didn't play a part in the Cuban Missile Crisis in the sense of  
6 we never intended to use them. That's certainly the case. But  
7 it's not true that they weren't on our minds. And those of us  
8 who -- who -- who --

9 MAN'S VOICE: That's an important distinction.

10 MR. McNAMARA: Well, it is an important distinction  
11 and it relates to today because -- to the point we were talking  
12 about. Because those of us who are concerned about Soviet reac-  
13 tion to air strikes or invasion didn't believe that the Soviet  
14 political leaders, even in the face of a massive air strike or  
15 an invasion, would authorize -- or thought it unlikely, I should  
16 say -- that the Soviet political leaders would authorize the  
17 launch of a nuclear weapon from the island of Cuba against the  
18 U.S. But we didn't know that they had the power to prevent it.  
19 And in the face of a military strike by the U.S. against a  
20 missile site or an invasion, we couldn't be sure that the second  
21 lieutenant in command wouldn't, perhaps quite properly in his  
22 mind, feel that it was his responsibility to launch the nuclear  
23 weapon before it was destroyed.

24 MR. NEUSTADT: Well, they must have some -- some com-  
25 parable worries.

1 MR. BALL: Well, this explains why we all got two  
2 -- ten years older in two weeks.

3 MR. McNAMARA: But what it also emphasizes, I think,  
4 is that we ought to have more certainty about what their --  
5 their controls are and they ought to have more certainty about  
6 what ours are. And we both ought to think more about how to  
7 minimize the risk of these weapons. The weapons aren't going to  
8 be destroyed so quickly that we won't have opportunity to use  
9 them if we wish to. God forbid we would ever wish to.

10 But what we must try to do is avoid using them before  
11 we wish to or being pressured into using them when we would find  
12 it to our disadvantage to use them if we'd had more time or more  
13 certainty they could be protected.

14 MR. JOHNSON: I'm intrigued by the thought -- following  
15 up your thought, intrigued by the thought of having -- having  
16 the Soviets and Americans without operational responsibilities.  
17 Not to negotiate with each other, but having continuity within  
18 their governments and continuity within their departments, sit  
19 down and discuss these matters such as this, including where are  
20 we going on this -- on this nuclear escalation, in an abstract a  
21 manner as you can get, but to exchange thoughts on it and get a  
22 dialogue going on it that's not dependent upon changes in our  
23 government, not dependent on changes in the Soviet government,  
24 but to get some -- some dialogue going and try to develop some  
25 common -- common doctrines and channels that could be used and

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1 applied in cases of -- of emergency. I realize the difficulties  
2 on it, but I think that the stakes are so high --

3 MR. McNAMARA: Realize the danger in not doing it.

4 MR. JOHNSON: That's it. Yes, that's right. That we've  
5 got to find some way of doing it.

6 MR. BUNDY: You need to underline, too, I think the  
7 point that practice in communication really does enter in. That  
8 is to say, if you have this kind of thing going and you use it,  
9 even for quite different things -- And the President uses it,  
10 and the Chairman uses it and they get some sense of the way each  
11 other are as communicating persons, then if you have this kind  
12 of danger, I don't say that it makes it easy, but it -- it  
13 increases the chance that you will avoid some catastrophic mis-  
14 understanding.

15 MR. JOHNSON: I -- I most thoroughly agree.

16 MR. BALL: Well, of course, it was the exchange of  
17 personal letters in this case that made --

18 MR. JOHNSON: Yes, but that was between the two -- two  
19 presidents and --

20 MR. BUNDY: And didn't have the wider context we're  
21 talking about.

22 MR. NEUSTADT: Alex, you wanted -- You had wanted to  
23 bring up a question -- I think we ought to insert right here for  
24 a minute, and then -- then go to a negotiations that took place,  
25 semi-negotiations took place later in the second week of this

1 crisis. It's another example of very good management. The effort  
2 made in the State Department to get simultaneous notification  
3 and diplomatic initiative started with all the OAS governments  
4 and with all our European allies all at once. I don't know whe-  
5 there State has ever managed anything on that scale before, or  
6 since, for that matter, but it was very effectively done.

7 MR. JOHNSON: No, I don't think that we have. And I  
8 think that that was the time that we had to do that. We were  
9 given 24 hours from Saturday -- from Saturday at Midnight until  
10 Sunday Midnight, before the President's speech, to send out  
11 personal messages from the President to some 15-16 chiefs of  
12 state, to brief our ambassadors --

13 MR. BUNDY: To put them in position. you mean, because  
14 they weren't delivered until the Monday, I think.

15 MR. JOHNSON: Oh, no, they were not. This is preposi-  
16 tion -- getting all these things prepositioned. We sent out some  
17 450 messages in those -- in those 24 hours, containing presiden-  
18 tial messages, containing the text of the President's speech,  
19 containing the resolution for the Security Council, instructions  
20 to our ambassadors, getting all our ambassadors in Latin America  
21 back to their posts, and having them poised to -- to see each  
22 chief of state there as quickly as they could after the speech,  
23 to get their agree to the OAS resolution, so that -- And all the  
24 things that we also did in NATO. Dispatching Dean Acheson to  
25 see DeGualle. All these things took a lot of time even under the



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1 best of circumstances. And I feel that a part of the success of  
2 the Cuban operation from our standpoint was the fact that when  
3 we -- when this got surfaced, we had a solid phalanx in Latin  
4 America for the first time, we had a solid phalanx. We had  
5 every chief of every government, non-communist government in the  
6 world, that had been briefed on this. And Khrushchev found him-  
7 self faced with a solid wall of -- of -- you know, support --  
8 support for the United States, in general, in this. And I think  
9 it had a great effect upon his -- his decision to see or to throw  
10 in the towel and see that he had to respond to this. They had not  
11 done anything comparable at all. They had done no contingency  
12 planning. They had not lined up any support. And it became very,  
13 very evident --

14 MR. BUNDY: They didn't even have a line for several  
15 cases.

16 MR. JOHNSON: They didn't have a line for several  
17 cases. And what I'm saying is I think that this was a big factor  
18 in the success of the operation. I always point to it, of course,  
19 as being, to my mind, a model of the use of military power and  
20 diplomacy together to accomplish a major national objective with-  
21 out ever being required to fire a shot.

22 MR. BALL: Well, let me say it was an extraordinary  
23 technical performance on the part of the Career Service. I never  
24 was more pleased in my life with the State Department --

25 MR. McNAMARA: Led by Alex.

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1 MR. BALL: Led by Alex. Led by Alex.

2 MR. JOHNSON: Well, I wasn't asking for that, but --

3 MR. BALL: No, no.

4 (Several speaking at once briefly here.)

5 MR. NEUSTADT: That's one of those things. There are  
6 very few times in the world where you hear just those words said.

7 MR. McNAMARA: Well, one other comment on the Career  
8 Service. The unsung heroes of this whole operation were the  
9 Thompsons, and the <sup>Boklins</sup> ~~Polands~~ <sup>Shane</sup>, and the Kennans. Now it's true that  
10 George Kennan wasn't in the country at the time and <sup>helen</sup> ~~Boland~~ left  
11 for Paris in the middle of it, but Tommy was here the whole time,  
12 and all three of them had built-up an understanding through a  
13 lifetime of study of the Soviet Union and their behavior that  
14 was the foundation of advice to those of us who were not as  
15 experienced as they, and I think was the foundation of the  
16 President's confidence in the advice he received, and substan-  
17 tially shaped the President's approach to the question. There's  
18 absolutely no question in my mind about that.

19 MR. BALL: Ilwellyn Thompson was absolutely fantastic  
20 because everything he predicted worked out exactly as he said it  
21 would.

22 MR. BUNDY: Let me give you a very specific example,  
23 because it relates to the original problem of -- Just one -- and  
24 I'll be out of your way. It relates to the initial choice and  
25 takes us back to that. One of the worries that bothered some of

us who were doubtful about the blockade-guarantine in the early stages was that it looked to us as if it might easily lead to a response against Berlin, and there was a certain surface plausibility to that. That was the first British Foreign Office reaction the following week --

MR. BALL: And we'd been having Berlin troubles.

MR. BUNDY: And we'd been having Berlin troubles.

Tommy thought about that, and I remember very well his saying in George's conference room, I just don't think they think that way. They will not think that a reply to a naval action in the Caribbean should be a major assault on Western European and on all the other countries that that would involve. And he was surely right.

MR. BALL: One other thing that he said at that time, which impressed me very much, because it was rather a novel idea to me. When we were talking about the question of getting the OAS approval and the U.N. and so. He said this is terribly important because the Soviets are very legalistic.

MR. McNAMARA: I recall that as well, George, exactly.

MR. NEUSTADT: Bourgeois.

MR. JOHNSON: Well, all I was going to say, I entirely -- obviously entirely agree with, you know, Tommy. Chip was only there for the first couple of days, but Tommy contributed so, so much to it.

But what I was going to say was, you know, Tommy just

1 didn't grow on a tree during the course of that crisis. He had  
2 been -- gone into the Foreign Service years and years before,  
3 and he'd been nurtured and trained, and he had the experience --

4 MR. BUNDY: We understand that he was in FSO eight,  
5 seven, six --

6 MR. JOHNSON: That's right. Well, I just like to say  
7 a word for the importance -- important, I think, of -- of what  
8 our professional service can do and the service that it can be  
9 in these times. And it requires -- It requires though that it be  
10 nurtured and continued.

11 MR. BUNDY: And requires something that I'm not that  
12 sure that we do as well now as we did with that generation,  
13 namely to give the professional time to master in depth what is  
14 not the whole world, but is a major fraction.

15 MR. JOHNSON: No, we don't. We don't.

16 MR. NEUSTADT: We don't have anything like those two  
17 services now.

18 MR. JOHNSON: No, no. We don't even have it in the  
19 Japan and the China service.

20 MR. McNAMARA: I was just going to say. One of the  
21 reasons I raised it, because by contrast, during the -- so much  
22 of the Vietnam period we were left with a vacuum that had been  
23 created by the McCarthy days in the mid-50s, and today, it's my  
24 impression, just looking at it from the outside, that the service  
25 is not permitted to specialize, as Mac said, to provide

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1 professionals with the time to pick-up the languages, to pick-up  
2 the culture, to study the history, to become lifetime experts in  
3 a particular area of the world.

4 MR. JOHNSON: Well, you know, that's music to my ears  
5 and I could go on in that, but --

6 MR. BUNDY: I think -- We're not -- It's actually not  
7 your ears we're shooting at.

8 MR. McNAMARA: No, and it's one of the lessons I think  
9 we need to draw from this, and this is why I want to express my  
10 thought. Because as an outsider, who could hardly spell..

11 (End of Side 1, Audiotape No. 2)

12 MR. McNAMARA (Continuing on Side 2): ... working  
13 without a solid foundation of knowledge. And I think so many of  
14 our -- of our civilian appointees in the upper ranks of the  
15 government are in that position. And it's the -- It's the founda-  
16 tion of expertise that is built-up in particular parts of the  
17 government, in the military or the CIA, or particularly in the  
18 State Department, that is absolutely essential. And I do not  
19 believe today our society puts the premium on it that it should.

20 MR. JOHNSON: Well, we can go on with this, but of  
21 course we've -- But the Administration now changing every four  
22 years, as it has ever since Eisenhower, and each new Administra-  
23 tion coming into office on the -- on the policy or the platform  
24 of throwing the rascals out, you know, our service is being very,  
25 very badly --

1 MR. McNAMARA: Or denigrating. Denigrating the senior  
2 people in the --

3 MR. BUNDY: Because they're contaminated.

4 MR. JOHNSON: They're contaminated with the previous  
5 Administration, yes.

6 MR. NEUSTADT: Then you see -- Then you link that, Bob,  
7 to your command and control, it's depressing. If I were the  
8 Soviets, I'd have no confidence in this control you talk about.  
9 Why should they, over on our side? I mean how, you know --

10 Anyway, I wanted to ask you gentlemen about one final  
11 aspect of this business. The second Saturday. First there was  
12 the trollop ploy. I've got a minor question. I've never under-  
13 stood why that was such an all-fired genius of an idea. It seems  
14 to me more or less standard. Am I wrong? Correct me.

15 MR. JOHNSON: No, no. I wouldn't say it was standard  
16 at all. It seemed quite obvious. But that second message we got  
17 we had to assume had been sent after the first message and we had  
18 to assume that it probably, something had happened to change his  
19 mind in the interim.

20 MR. BALL: Well, moreover, it was perfectly clear that  
21 that second message was written by a committee. It was not dis-  
22 patched --

23 MR. McNAMARA: It was dispatched -- That was the view  
24 of the Soviet government. That was clear.

25 (Several speaking at once briefly here.)

1. MR. NEUSTADT: Right. Right. Okay. -- more understand-  
2 able.

3 MR. JOHNSON: And -- But -- But -- You can say now  
4 that it looks kind of obvious that you should do the trollop  
5 ploy and pick-up the first one, but -- And thank goodness we did  
6 it. It was the thing to do and it worked. But I don't know why --  
7 It wasn't obvious at the time, I might say --

8 MR. NEUSTADT: That's what I wanted to get.

9 MR. BUNDY: I think the shock of the second message  
10 is understandable, because we had, after a period of very severe  
11 tension, thought we saw in the Friday message the beginnings of  
12 -- the beginnings of a resolution and now we're confronted with  
13 all the stuffed -- bureaucratic prose on a very different line,  
14 and that's a shock. I agree with you, if the point of your ques-  
15 tion is that it would have been stupid if we hadn't worked our  
16 way to some -- something like the trollop ploy, some way of  
17 re-proposing the parts that we agreed with and not -- not wasting  
18 too much time on frantic argument over the things we didn't agree  
19 with. That was good sense. But it was good sense produced ini-  
20 tially by Bob Kennedy at a moment of great tension, and that's a  
21 major contribution.

22 MR. McNAMARA: Absolutely. And I can recall leaving the  
23 White House after it had been decided which message to reply to  
24 and after the reply had been drafted and approved by the Presi-  
25 dent, and it was being sent out. It was a Saturday evening. I can

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1 remember the sunset. We left about the time the sun was setting,  
2 in October, and I, at least, was so uncertain as to whether the  
3 Soviets would accept replying to the first instead of the second,  
4 or accept -- in a sense, our acceptance of the formula of the  
5 first, that I wondered if I'd ever see another Saturday sunset  
6 like that.)

7 MR. JOHNSON: I think --

8 MR. McNAMARA: (That may sound over-dramatic, but that  
9 was the way I was feeling at the time. It was that serious a  
10 problem. That was Saturday night.

11 MR. JOHNSON: That's right. No, no. I think many of us  
12 felt that.

13 MR. NEUSTADT: And that's because you were looking  
14 ahead to Tuesday, or whatever day it <sup>(The ambits)</sup> was -- was to have been, or  
15 Wednesday.

16 MR. McNAMARA: Exactly. Exactly.

17 MR. NEUSTADT: And then Wednesday. Escalation after  
18 the --

19 MR. McNAMARA: That is right, and the possible -- And  
20 there was a very tiny possibility, I understand, Dick, but the  
21 possible effect on our country of even one of those warheads,  
22 nuclear warheads being launched against us.

23 MR. BALL: Bob, you and I were walking through the Rose  
24 Garden the following morning and the weather was the most beauti-  
25 ful weather I could ever recall. And I said, walking through the



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1 Rose Garden, this reminds me of a Georgia O'Keefe painting of  
2 an -- of a rose coming up through an <sup>ox skull</sup> -- And that was exactly  
3 the kind of --

4 MR. McNAMARA: Yes. We hadn't had the reply yet.

5 MR. BALL: That's right. No.

6 MR. NEUSTADT: Tell me one other thing. Paul Nitze was  
7 represented to me by a couple of his assistants on that night, at  
8 that time, who received him when he got back to his office. He  
9 was your Assistant Secretary, who had a rather different view  
10 of a lot of these matters, as terribly depressed about the day,  
11 but for a quite different set of reasons. He worried about the --  
12 about Robert Kennedy's mission to Dobrynin and he was appalled  
13 at the notion of, as it had been told to me, of defusing the  
14 missiles in Turkey.

15 MR. McNAMARA: Dick, I don't have that recollection  
16 and let me give you one reason why I think it's unlikely. I  
17 don't have the recollection at all and I think it's unlikely  
18 because, frankly, I don't believe Paul knew of the decision  
19 which had been taken by that time of removing the missiles from  
20 Turkey. Because I didn't tell anybody and there were only a  
21 handful of people, five or six --

22 MR. BALL: Let's make sure we're talking about the  
23 same thing. There was a defusing of missiles in Turkey, that is  
24 to say, rendering them incapable of firing without an authority,  
25 which occurred during that week. I think Paul did react to that.

1 MR. McNAMARA: But it wasn't that Saturday that they  
2 were defused.

3 MR. BUNDY: It might have happened earlier.

4 (Several again speaking at the same time briefly.)

5 MR. BALL: It happened late in the day.

6 MR. McNAMARA: No, but what -- But what happened on  
7 the Saturday --

8 MAN'S VOICE: I can tell you what happened.

9 MR. McNAMARA: -- was quite a different action. And I  
10 don't think Paul knew of it. In any event, I don't myself recall  
11 the incident you're speaking of.

12 MR. JOHNSON: Dick, on this --

13 MR. BUNDY: I'm quite sure Paul did not know about  
14 the quite separate question of readiness to remove the missiles.

15 MR. NEUSTADT: Yes. That's what I mean. by the -- by  
16 the trip to Dobrynin.

17 MAN'S VOICE: That's what you meant by that.

18 MR. NEUSTADT: Yes.

19 MAN'S VOICE: He didn't know about that.

20 MR. McNAMARA: I don't think so either, Dick.

21 MR. JOHNSON: In regard to the course of action, I know  
22 it's been said that Paul -- this quarantine, that Paul was not --  
23 not in support of this. All I can say is that Paul and I --

24 MR. BALL: It was Saturday morning that he ordered the  
25 missiles defused. Saturday morning.

1 MR. JOHNSON: Paul and I drafted the scenario that --  
2 that set forth the program that was eventually followed. We  
3 worked -- We worked very, very hard at this, I on the diplomatic  
4 side and he on the military side.

5 MR. McNAMARA: I think by the time of the decision --

6 MR. JOHNSON: And he worked -- He worked most intim-  
7 ately on this and most full of support insofar as my association  
8 with him was concerned.

9 MR. McNAMARA: I think that by the time the decision  
10 was made to -- to move the blockade and certainly after it was  
11 made --

12 MR. JOHNSON: Quarantine.

13 MR. McNAMARA: I mean the quarantine. Certainly after  
14 it was made, which would include that Saturday, Paul was not  
15 present for that --

16 MR. BUNDY: We can't hurt you now, Alex.

17 MR. NEUSTADT: Well, I only raise it because for 20  
18 years people have gone around talking about Paul's views, and I  
19 thought since he -- We haven't been able to lure him into this  
20 for natural, understandable reasons, given his assignment.

21 MR. JOHNSON: I normally sat next to him in the ExComs  
22 on this and we had a very close relationship, and I never felt  
23 that he was objecting when the decision was finally made. I think  
24 we all -- We all were on both sides of the question throughout  
25 that week and we all gradually came --

1 MR. BUNDY: I think one should make an underline to  
2 this point, that whatever the differences of opinion and argu-  
3 ments and preferences had been in the period leading up to the  
4 decision, I don't think there was any question -- There wasn't  
5 a single member of ExCom who didn't track with each decision as  
6 the President made it all the way along, which isn't to say  
7 that a particular officer may not have been discouraged by the  
8 tenor of discussion on a particular day. That's quite possible.

9 But I think we ought to come back, if you agree, Dick,  
10 to the -- the messages Bob actually carried, Bob Kennedy, on the  
11 Saturday, because those certainly were important and we haven't  
12 talked about them at this session.

13 MR. NEUSTADT: Now these are the messages that he took  
14 personally to Dobrynin of -- of making clear, as I understand it,  
15 that there would no trade of Turkish missiles for Cuban missiles,  
16 but that the -- we understood the Turkish missiles to be obsoles-  
17 cent, or the missiles in Turkey and Italy to be obsolescent. The  
18 President had decided to have them removed before this ever arose.  
19 And in the normal course, they would be removed soon after, but  
20 that if that was ever represented as a trade, well, it was  
21 unacceptable. Have I got it about right?

22 MR. McNAMARA: Well, that's my understanding of what  
23 the President decided. That's my understanding of what he author-  
24 ized Bobby to say, and as far as I know, he said it exactly like  
25 that. And I must -- Oh, one further point. He was instructed to

1 make clear that if the Soviets ever discussed this, we would  
2 deny it. And the point I was going to make was that we did remove  
3 the missiles. I think this was a very important point from  
4 Khrushchev's personal point of view within the Soviet govern-  
5 ment. He undoubtedly had to tell other people that this had been  
6 told to him by President Kennedy. There wasn't, to the best of  
7 my knowledge, one single leak by either government. It was a  
8 remarkable action.

9 And we did remove the missiles.

10 MAN'S VOICE: How much trouble did you have with that?

11 There was another case where we had the right man as assistant  
12 desk officer.

13 MR. McNAMARA: Well, I went back -- After the Presi-  
14 dent had authorized this, I told him I would personally handle  
15 it. I went back and I called John McNaughton, who was a marvelous  
16 man all of you knew, and who you know was killed in an accident  
17 shortly after. And I said John, I'm going to tell you something.  
18 I don't want you to ask any questions about it. I don't want you  
19 to say to anybody else why it's being done, 'cause I'm not going  
20 to tell you, I just want you to do it, and I want every single  
21 missile removed out of Turkey. I want them taken to Italy. I want  
22 them cut up. I want photographs of them and I want it done by X  
23 date, and I want the photographs in my hand, now do it. Don't ask  
24 questions, just do it. And he did it.

25 MR. NEUSTADT: I understand he had a considerable

1 problem though with your department.

2 MR. JOHNSON: Yes. There was some -- playing its usual  
3 role. No, I don't recall that there was -- People -- People --  
4 Nobody that I can recall in our department --

5 MR. McNAMARA: A lot of people must have wondered why  
6 it was being done and had it been properly prepared for, which  
7 it hadn't been.

8 MR. JOHNSON: Well, no. The concern in my department  
9 was had the Italian and the Turkish governments been prepared  
10 for it.

11 MR. McNAMARA: Which they hadn't been.

12 MR. JOHNSON: Which they hadn't been.

13 MR. BALL: Well, we had been talking to them for a  
14 long time. They got most of the blame in the books for it.

15 (Several talking simultaneously throughout this  
16 section.)

17 MR. JOHNSON: But the important point here, Dick, is  
18 the President made the decision to have them removed long before  
19 the Missile Crisis in Cuba. That's a very, very important --

20 MR. BALL: With -- With the Turkish government, pri-  
21 marily with the Turkish government, and they were not -- Theore-  
22 tically, say, they were committed to NATO. They were something  
23 where NATO was involved. I mean it wasn't a purely unilateral  
24 decision.

25 MR. JOHNSON: That's right.

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1 MR. BALL: -- that the United States could make.

2 MR. JOHNSON: And that's what --

3 MR. BALL: Of course, by that time, we were hoping that  
4 there would be -- the Polaris would be sufficiently present  
5 so that this wouldn't be needed anyway, and because they prob-  
6 ably didn't work.

7 MR. BUNDY: Years later, in fact just this last year,  
8 I found myself reading memorandum of a meeting in the Oval Office  
9 and the next preceding Administration, in which a message is  
10 delivered to President Eisenhower to the effect that senior  
11 commanders are beginning to question the usefulness of the  
12 short range missiles in Turkey, to which his reply is, but I  
13 always told them they shouldn't do that.

14 MR. McNAMARA: Now this is a very interesting point.  
15 Here again, we're talking about military realities on the one  
16 hand and perceptions on the other, which were misperceptions,  
17 but had become reality in place of the underlying reality. The  
18 missiles were worthless in the Eisenhower Administration. They  
19 sure as hell were worthless and known to be worthless in the  
20 Kennedy Administration. And yet, because the Soviets during the  
21 Cuban Missile Crisis said, in effect, they said we won't remove  
22 our missiles from Cuba unless you remove yours from Turkey, there  
23 was almost a requirement that we go to war with the Soviets to  
24 preserve missiles in Turkey that were worthless. And there was a  
25 real danger at one point that that --

1 MR. BUNDY: State of mind would take over.

2 MR. McNAMARA: Exactly. Exactly. And one of our great  
3 achievements, it seems to me, is we avoided that.

4 MR. NEUSTADT: That is what was bugging the President  
5 at the end.

6 MR. McNAMARA: He -- I recall him saying very well, I  
7 am not going to go to war over worthless missiles in Turkey. I  
8 don't want to go to war anyhow, but I am certainly not going to  
9 go to war over worthless missiles in Turkey. Now I don't know how  
10 to get out of this. We eventually figured how to get out of it.

11 But I mention this because there is so -- There are so  
12 many misperceptions existant in the world today that are driving  
13 us --

14 MR. BALL: Very much so.

15 MR. BUNDY: -- military that aren't important are  
16 stated to be vital.

17 MR. McNAMARA: Which become major issues between --  
18 between states and between NATO and the Warsaw Pact, and could  
19 lead to war.

20 MR. NEUSTADT: Pershings.

21 MR. McNAMARA: Pershings a good illustration. Well,  
22 let's cut that out of this tape. We don't want to lose credibility.

23 (Laughter.)

24 MR. NEUSTADT: Yes, sir. Yes, sir. Have we ever -- Have  
25 we ever put on record the genesis of that -- that -- that mission



1 of RFK's to Dobrynin?

2 MR. BUNDY: Well, let me describe it as I remember it,  
3 and then George and Bob were both there, and correct and amend.

4 We had the meeting in the Oval Office. We'd reached  
5 the conclusion that we would make the soft answer, accepting the  
6 Friday terms, no invasion of Cuba, you take your missiles out,  
7 essentially. Then we get into the Oval Office and I don't want  
8 to be held at the exact persons present, but as I recall it, the  
9 President, the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Defense,  
10 Deputy Secretary of State, or Under-Secretary were you then?

11 MR. BALL: Under, yes. I never was anything else.

12 MR. JOHNSON: So it was enough for you, George. With  
13 you it was the same -- That was all there was to be, George.

14 MR. BUNDY: And then there was Gilpatrick, the Number  
15 Two men in the Pentagon, and Ted Sorenson, and me. And I think  
16 that's who was there. And the question was exactly how would --  
17 And, of course, the Attorney General, who was to be the emis-  
18 sary. How would he convey the message? And we went up and down,  
19 sorted out how to convey the general agreement with the first  
20 letter. And then, as I recall it, the Secretary of State said,  
21 Dean Rusk said, "Can't we say to him that we can get those mis-  
22 siles out of Turkey"?

23 MAN'S VOICE: I think it was the President who said  
24 that.

25 MR. BUNDY: I know the President picked it up instantly.

1 He's been saying it all day long.

2 MR. McNAMARA: That's right, he had.

3 MR. BUNDY: He had been saying it all day long and  
4 the record shows him saying it at various earlier times and  
5 saying the kind of thing you describe. And what I think happened  
6 was that the Secretary pushed on a point that he knew the Presi-  
7 dent cared about.

8 We then hammered back and forth on it and reached the  
9 conclusion that we could say it -- and I don't recall the inputs  
10 at all as to the particular formulations -- reached the formula-  
11 tion that we have described, that we could say what had been our  
12 intention for a long time, what was our clear purpose. Soon  
13 after the crisis, as long as it were not connected to the crisis,  
14 as long as nobody represented it as a quid pro quo, which it was  
15 not. It was a settled intent. And as long as nobody tried to  
16 make an open affair of it. About the way you described it a  
17 minute ago.

18 And that was not a long meeting. That might have been  
19 a 20-minute meeting.

20 MR. NEUSTADT: And I think it's important for one or  
21 another, whoever wants to pick-up this theme, to distinguish that  
22 private, qualified assurance from shenanigans, which, again, 20  
23 years later, lots of people find a hard distinction to make, of  
24 -- I don't have any trouble with it, but lots of people do, so I  
25 want to give you your chance to make the distinction. The -- There

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1 was what was the reason why this could not be publicly acknow-  
2 ledged?

3 MR. BUNDY: None of us was able to figure out a way  
4 of explaining it publicly that didn't look as if it wouldn't  
5 be taken by many people as a sellout of our allies.

6 MR. BALL: And furthermore, you have to -- You have to  
7 recall that this was in the context of a column that Walter  
8 Lippman had had, in which Lippman had proposed that the solution  
9 of this problem be through a trade. You have to remember that  
10 this was a position that Adlai Stevenson had tried -- tried to  
11 sell the -- the ExCom and the President when he came down from  
12 New York, that it should be a bargain.

13 MR. McNAMARA: And you have to recall also that the  
14 Lippman column had led to intense outcries of -- of opposition  
15 from --

16 MR. BALL: From the Turks.

17 MR. McNAMARA: From the Turks and other members of  
18 NATO.

19 MAN'S VOICE: And from London.

20 MR. McNAMARA: Yes, exactly, other members of NATO and  
21 from the Turks.

22 MR. JOHNSON: So, the ground had not been prepared  
23 at that point. If we'd -- If the missile -- We couldn't do it  
24 properly.

25 MR. BUDNY: It wouldn't have worked. It would have been

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1 gravely against our interest, the interest of the Alliance. It  
2 would have given Khrushchev, in political terms, a victory  
3 rather than --

4 MR. BALL: Yes. He would have said I got something out  
5 of this and therefore it was a good thing to do.

6 MR. BUNDY: Then one step further and then I know what  
7 Bob says is going to be the -- you know, the punchline. But just  
8 one further small point, namely that the President had the auth-  
9 ority to say what he said. He wasn't saying I'll go to the  
10 Congress. He wasn't saying, as another President said in another  
11 context, I'll support you if they violate the truce. He was say-  
12 ing I, as President, assure you that these missiles will be gone.  
13 He was talking about something he had the authority to do and  
14 could execute.

15 MR. McNAMARA: I was simply going to add that it was  
16 important to frame it exactly as it was framed, because don't  
17 forget we were dealing not with a military problem, but with a  
18 political problem. And if we had not framed the withdrawal of  
19 the missiles from Turkey as we did, we would have created  
20 another political problem. We would have divided the Alliance.  
21 We would have weakened it and the Soviets would have faced a  
22 weakened Alliance, and this would have been a danger to the  
23 Alliance.

24 MR. BALL: The propaganda value against this in Europe  
25 would have been here is the United States, selling -- because once

1 they're faced with some missiles themselves in Cuba, they're pre-  
2 pared to sell NATO out.

3 MR. NEUSTADT: Decoupling, as one --

4 MR. McNAMARA: And again, I think because of the advice  
5 we'd had from Tommy, there was a high probability the Soviets  
6 would accept the explanation that was given to them and adhere  
7 to the terms. Because they -- they could have seriously weakened  
8 us had they disclosed those terms.

9 MR. BUNDY: And it occurs to me, as I listen to Bob,  
10 that very probably Tommy Thompson was in that room. It's very  
11 unlikely that the President would have worked out final instruc-  
12 tions for a communication to the Soviet government at that stage  
13 of the crisis without Thompson.

14 MR. JOHNSON: I don't know that you've covered, Dick,  
15 as far as this settlement was concerned, that we not only got the  
16 missiles out, but we also got out in the subsequent negotiations  
17 the IL-28 bombers, 42 of them that were in there. They were of  
18 great concern to us. The bombers were not a part of the -- the  
19 agreement.

20 MR. BUNDY: We'd initially agreed to tolerate the  
21 bombers, you recall.

22 MR. JOHNSON: To tolerate the bombers. And we got the  
23 bombers out also.

24 MR. BUNDY: Also, because Thompson told the President  
25 he could.

1 MR. JOHNSON: He could, yes.

2 MR. McNAMARA: And once last word, to attempt to  
3 re-create the environment of the time. After the missiles were  
4 moved and the bombers removed and after we had reconnaissance  
5 aircraft fly 25 feet off the decks of the freighters removing  
6 the missiles and the bombers, so low you could read the serial  
7 numbers on the missiles, and we accounted for every missile and  
8 every bomber, it was still widely believed in the country that  
9 we'd been defeated, the Soviets had not taken them out. And you  
10 may remember there was therefore a live television program that  
11 went on for an hour-and-a-half while John Hughes, who was the  
12 intelligence expert in the Defense Intelligence Agency, pre-  
13 sented the pictures and presented the argument, and we then  
14 answered questions from the press to try to allay the fears of  
15 important parts of the U.S. public and the Congress that we'd  
16 been defeat, that the Soviets had not done what they said they  
17 would do.

18 I mention this to show you the environment within  
19 which these decisions took place and why there was so much con-  
20 troversy over what alternatives should be followed.

21 MR. BUNDY: And let me make one other point here that  
22 is very important, I think, for the long run future. We haven't  
23 had time to discuss it, but when you go back and look at this  
24 two-week period, one of the most important events, a controlling  
25 event is the President's speech to the country. You go back and

1 re-read that speech today and you'll see that to an astonishing  
2 degree he laid out the reasons in the very political wide-scale  
3 sense, not the missile-counting sense, made the distinction that  
4 we've made in this discussion, that Bob McNamara has made parti-  
5 cularly, made the case that this was something to be settled in  
6 terms of the long run peace of the world. Explained what was  
7 going to happen and carried the country with him, which became  
8 very clear.

9           It's quite right that we had to have the right arrange-  
10 ment, a quarantine. Quite right that we had to have the kind of  
11 diplomatic mass action that Alex organized. But the most impor-  
12 tant thing to have was the understanding and support of the  
13 American people, and that was established that evening and sus-  
14 tained through what was a very difficult week.

15           MR. JOHNSON: A very important point.

16           MR. NEUSTADT: Gentlemen, anything you want to add  
17 before we conclude. We have about one minutes.

18           MR. McNAMARA: Thanks to you, Dick, for taking the time  
19 to come down and lead us through this.

20           MR. NEUSTADT: Nobody wants the last minute. So thank  
21 you very much.

22           MR. BUNDY: Let the tape run.

23           - - - - -